DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 062 936 HE 003 054

AUTHOR	Bowers, Thomas A.; Pugh, Richard C.
TITLE	A Comparison of Factors Underlying College Choice by Students and Parents.
INSTITUTION	Indiana Univ., Bloomington.; North Carolina Univ., Chapel Hill.
PUB DATE	Apr 72
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the 1972 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 3-7, 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*College Admission; *College Choice; College Freshmen; *Decision Making; *Higher Education; *Personal Interests

ABSTRACT

This document presents the results of a study designed to determine the reasons why students and parents select the college or university the student is to attend. The study took place in the Fall of 1970 when the freshman students at Indiana University and their parents were issued questionnaires concerning various criteria for choice. For both groups of participants, the academic reputation of the university and the reputation of the specific department or school in which the student intended to study were the 2 most important reasons. However, financial, geographical and academic factors were more important to parents than students, while students attached greater importance to social and cultural and to informal advice factors. The findings suggest that university admissions officials should be sure to provide high school counselors and teachers with relevant information about their institution that the counselors can pass along to prospective students. It also appears that there needs to be increased recognition of the importance of alumni in attracting students. (HS)

ED 062 936

N-NPO
HE

A COMPARISON OF FACTORS UNDERLYING COLLEGE CHOICE BY STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Thomas A. Bowers
University of North Carolina

Richard C. Pugh
Indiana University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

A paper presented to the
American Educational Research Association
Chicago, Illinois
April 3-7, 1972

HE 003054

Studies of college choice decisions have focused almost exclusively upon students' expressed reasons for choosing a particular institution. In his study of National Merit Scholarship finalists, Holland (1958) concluded that the most important factor in their choice of a college was the "prestige" of the school or the department in which they intended to study. Kerr (1962) found that high school seniors considered their parents to be the most important influence on their decision, followed by school counselors, teachers, relatives, friends, self, and college representatives.

In an attempt to determine if typical explanations of college choice could be factor analyzed into a few categories, Richards and Holland (1965) found evidence for four factors--intellectual emphasis, practicality, advice of others, and social emphasis. These four factors were generated from a set of 27 items administered as a part of the ACT test battery using a three per cent representative sample of the November, 1964 ACT national sample. The intellectual emphasis factor had high loadings on "academic interests and values"; the practicality factor had high loadings on "closeness to home" and "low cost"; the advice of others factor had high loadings on "advice of high school teacher" and "offer of financial assistance"; and, the social emphasis factor had high loadings on the "social climate" and "extra-curricular life."

By factor analyzing responses to 148 statements about possible reasons for choosing a particular college, Morrison (1968) concluded that five factors were important to liberal arts seniors from middle class and upper middle class communities in ten states: Student Freedom, Social Mobility, Dependency, Personal Observation and Practicality. Stordahl (1970) sought college choice reasons of entering freshmen at Northern Michigan University with a question-

naire based upon the one developed by Richards and Holland. Intellectual Emphasis was the most important factor and the Advice of Others the least important. The other two factors were Practicality and Social Emphasis.

In this study, we went a step beyond ascertaining the reasons entering freshmen gave for choosing Indiana University--we also sought the factors which parents of these freshmen considered important.

Procedures

Beginning with a universe of possible reasons gathered from earlier college choice studies, we developed a questionnaire which included 22 reasons likely to be considered in the college choice decision. For each of the 22 reasons, students and parents were asked to indicate if that reason had been "of no importance, a minor consideration, or a major consideration." These responses were assigned the values 1, 2, and 3 respectively. A cover letter from the Dean of the University Division (to which all students are assigned for their freshman year) was attached to each questionnaire, explaining its purposes and what to do with the completed questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to all students who attended the first University Division freshmen counseling meeting during Orientation Week of Fall Semester 1970-71. The students were instructed to complete the questionnaires and turn them in at a checkpoint at registration two days later. Personnel were present at the checkpoint to collect the questionnaires and to assist students in completing them.

A total of 4,841 questionnaires were collected at the checkpoint. Of these, 4,215 were usable; 454 students had attempted college work before

June 1970 and were dropped from the analysis and 172 questionnaires could not be used because of missing data. We were confident that we had usable responses from over 80 per cent of the entering freshman class.

The same questionnaires were mailed to parents of all new students accepted as freshmen for Fall Semester 1970-71. Parents were given self-addressed, stamped envelopes to facilitate return of the questionnaires, which were sent to 6,365 families. Included, however, were parents whose children had been accepted for admission, but who did not choose, for any number of unspecified reasons, to enroll for the fall semester. We believe, however, that most parents in that category did not bother to return the questionnaire. A total of 3,085 questionnaires were returned and 2,941 of these were usable, for a response rate of approximately 50 per cent. Unfortunately, we had no way of ascertaining the correspondence between questionnaires received from students and those received from parents. In other words, we could not be sure if the children of the parents who returned questionnaires also returned theirs.

Findings

Parents' mean scores and ranks for each of the items are compared to those of students in Table 1. For both groups, the academic reputation of the university and the reputation of the specific department or school in which the student intended to study were the two most important reasons.

In Table 2, the reasons are arrayed according to the magnitude of difference between the group means. The items near the top and near the bottom of the list are those for which the differences in means were the greatest. Those items near the center are those for which the agreement was closest between students and parents.

The responses of parents and of students were separately factor analyzed by means of the Biomedical Computer Program BMD03M, which performs a principal component solution and an orthogonal rotation of the factor matrix. Unities were placed in the main diagonal of the correlation matrix and factors with eigenvalues greater than one were rotated. Rotated solutions were computed by the Varimax procedure. The factor structures for both parents and students were virtually identical, as indicated in Tables 3 and 4. Comparison of the factor structures of parents and students was performed by using the program "Relate," a program developed by Veldman (1967). The matrix of cosines of the angles between all pairs of factor axes showed that the rotation necessary to align the factor axes was virtually nothing. The cosines between matched factors ranged from .94 to .99 with a median of .98, while the cosines for unmatched factors ranged from -.21 to .23 with a median of approximately -.01.

Since the factor structures for parents and students were essentially the same, the responses from students and parents were pooled together, a factor analysis was performed, and factor scores were generated. The results are presented in Table 4. Parental factor scores were compared to student factor scores using analysis of variance.

Although strong consensus between parents and students was found for the most important factor in college choice (academic), and the least important factors in college choice (advice of others and geographic location), interesting differences emerged. The mean student factor score was significantly ($p < .01$) greater than the mean parent factor score for the social and cultural factor and the informal advice factor. In contrast, the mean parent factor score was significantly ($p < .01$) greater for the financial, geographic location and academic factors.

Discussion

The study revealed that parents and students attach somewhat different importance to factors relevant to the college choice decision. Financial, geographical, and academic factors were more important to parents than to students, while students attached greater importance to social and cultural and to informal advice factors. Such differences are not surprising. Parents probably paid the living and educational expenses for a majority of the students, and because of this investment, they were concerned that their children get the best education for that money. The importance of the geographical factor may have reflected a desire on the part of parents to keep their children as close to home as possible.

Students, on the other hand, since they would be living on campus, were more concerned with social, cultural, and other living conditions. It did seem surprising that students attached more relative importance to the advice of others, particularly family members, alumni, and high school teachers, than parents. This finding may not fit with the common notion of an independent youth unwilling to even ask for advice from older persons.

The findings suggest that university admissions officials should be sure to provide high (school counselors and teachers with relevant) information about their institution which the counselors, in turn, can pass along to prospective students. It also appears that there needs to be increased recognition of the importance of alumni in attracting students. Alumni should probably be encouraged to participate and should be provided with necessary materials and information.

Our findings have also raised some questions which seem worthy of further discussion and research. The results suggest that there may be

a rather complex interaction between students and parents faced with the decision of which college the student will attend. This interaction appears to be focused on the relative importance attached to the factors of finance and social climate. While it is apparent that students and parents place somewhat different importance on certain factors relevant to that decision, whose opinions are likely to carry the most weight in that interaction? Perhaps the question is better stated thusly: What variables are likely to predict greater weight for students or for parents? Does parental weight tend to increase as the parental proportion of financing increases? How might parental weight be affected by the extent and nature of their education? If we were to replicate the study, we would probably want to ask both parents and students to estimate their self-perceived influence in the final decision.

We also wonder how much of the importance of academic factors for both students and parents is a reflection of respondents saying what they think they should say. After all, in the popular view, isn't a college education primarily an academic experience and shouldn't academic factors therefore be most important in selecting a college?

REFERENCES

Holland, John. "Student Explanations of College Choice and Their Relation to College Popularity, College Productivity, and Sex Differences," College and University, 33:313-20 (Spring 1958).

Kerr, W. D. "Student Perceptions of Counselor Role in the College Decision," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 41:337-42 (December 1962).

Morrison, Jack R. "Factors Influential in College Selection," Clearing House, 42:265-70 (January 1968).

Richards, James M. and Holland, John L. "A Factor Analysis of Student Explanations of Their Choice of a College," American College Testing Program Research Report No. 8 (October 1965).

Stordahl, Kalmer E. "Student Perceptions of Influences on College Choice," Journal of Educational Research, 63: 209-12 (January 1970).

Veldman, Donald J. Fortran Programming for the Behavioral Sciences, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1967, 406p.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF AVERAGE SCORES AND RANK FOR EACH ITEM, PARENTS AND STUDENTS.

ITEMS	PARENTS Mean	PARENTS Rank	STUDENTS Mean	STUDENTS Rank
Cost, Fees and Tuition	2.50	3	2.35	4
Cost of Living	2.40	4	2.24	7 (tie)
Financial Assistance	1.75	18 (tie)	1.77	19
Distance From Home	2.02	11	1.81	17
Geographical Location	1.79	16	1.62	21
Advice--Family	1.77	17	1.99	13
Advice--Alumni	1.73	20	1.72	20
Advice--Teachers	1.83	15	1.79	18
Friends at I.U.	1.90	14	2.03	12
Campus Visit	2.20	8	2.27	5
College Night	1.32	22	1.27	22
Letters, Catalogs	2.00	12	1.98	14
Academic Reputation	2.79	1	2.63	1
Specific Reputation	2.66	2	2.59	2
State University	2.29	6	2.08	11
Campus Atmosphere	2.31	5	2.37	3
Social Climate	2.06	9	2.24	7 (tie)
Cosmopolitan	1.75	18 (tie)	1.89	15
Culture	2.28	7	2.16	9
Size	1.68	21	1.87	16
Recreation	1.99	13	2.10	10
Liberalism	2.05	10	2.26	6

TABLE 2. RANK ORDER OF DIFFERENCES, STUDENTS OVER PARENTS.[a]

ITEMS	
Advice of Family Members	+.22
I.U.'s Progressive, Liberal Atmosphere	+.21
Size of Student Body	+.21
Social Climate and Activities	+.18
Cosmopolitan Student Body	+.14
Friends Who Attended I.U.	+.13
Recreation Opportunities	+.11
Visit to the Campus	+.07
Friendliness and Beauty of Campus	+.06
Receipt of Financial Assistance	+.02
Advice of I.U. Alumni	-.01
Letters, Catalogs, Personal Contact	-.02
Advice of High School Teachers or Counselors	-.04
College Night Program	-.05
Reputation in Specific Academic Area	-.07
Cultural Opportunities	-.12
Cost of Fees and Tuition	-.15
Cost of Living	-.16
I.U.'s General Academic Reputation	-.16
Geographical Location	-.17
Fact that I.U. is a State University	-.21
Distance From Home	-.21

[a]Plus signs indicate items rated higher by students; minus signs those rated higher by parents.

TABLE 3. ITEMS COMPRISING FACTORS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS.

PARENTS		STUDENTS	
Factor Loading	Item	Factor Loading	Item
	FACTOR I -- SOCIAL AND CULTURAL		
.70	Campus Atmosphere	.69	Campus Atmosphere
.76	Social Climate	.75	Social Climate
.69	Cosmopolitan	.69	Cosmopolitan
.70	Culture	.65	Culture
.62	Size	.62	Size
.70	Recreation	.69	Recreation
.60	Liberalism	.66	Liberalism
		.46	Campus Visit
	FACTOR II -- FINANCIAL		
.88	Cost, Fees and Tuition	.87	Cost, Fees and Tuition
.85	Cost of Living	.87	Cost of Living
.48	Financial Assistance	.65	Financial Assistance
.58	State University	.43	State University
	FACTOR III -- INFORMAL ADVICE		
.75	Advice--Family	.60	Advice--Family
.78	Advice--Alumni	.71	Advice--Alumni
.62	Friends at I.U.	.51	Advice--Teachers
		.67	Friends at I.U.
	FACTOR IV -- GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION		
.87	Distance From Home	.82	Distance From Home
.83	Geographical Location	.78	Geographical Location
	FACTOR V -- ACADEMIC		
.68	Academic Reputation	.77	Academic Reputation
.82	Specific Reputation	.80	Specific Reputation
	FACTOR VI -- FORMAL ADVICE		
.57	Advice--Teachers		
.47	Campus Visit		
.54	College Night	.57	College Night
.65	Letters, Catalogs	.60	Letters, Catalogs

TABLE 4. ITEMS COMPRISING FACTORS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS COMBINED.

FACTOR	FACTOR LOADING	ITEM
FACTOR I -- SOCIAL AND CULTURAL	.46	Campus Visit
	.70	Campus Atmosphere
	.76	Social Climate
	.69	Cosmopolitan
	.64	Culture
	.63	Size
	.70	Recreation
	.64	Liberalism
FACTOR II -- FINANCIAL	.88	Cost, Fees and Tuition
	.87	Cost of Living
	.59	Financial Assistance
	.47	State University
FACTOR III -- INFORMAL ADVICE	.73	Advice--Family
	.77	Advice--Alumni
	.60	Friends at I.U.
FACTOR IV -- GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	.85	Distance From Home
	.81	Geographical Location
FACTOR V -- ACADEMIC	.75	Academic Reputation
	.80	Specific Reputation
FACTOR VI -- FORMAL ADVICE	.50	Advice--Teachers
	.64	College Night
	.66	Letters, Catalogs